
Defense Report

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War in Europe — We Would Run Out of Men before We Could Mobilize

The American general who would command all the forces of the North Atlantic alliance if the Warsaw Pact nations attacked tomorrow is convinced that the United States would run out of trained infantrymen, tank crew members, artillerymen and combat medics before Selective Service and the training establishment could begin producing replacements in the required numbers.

In testimony before a Congressional committee, Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, a former U.S. Army Chief of Staff, reflected the broadly accepted wisdom that the highly sophisticated battlefield of a European war would produce high numbers of casualties very quickly. Unless large numbers of trained replacements are ready for immediate dispatch, the U.S. units fighting in Europe, even though they are fighting successfully, could be so weakened by attrition that they would become ineffective.

The balance of the U.S. Army units—the active divisions stationed in the United States, the divisions of the Army National Guard and the substantial strength of the Army Reserve—are not designed to be replacements for units in combat but rather to reinforce them as soon as possible. To strip them for replacements simply means that they cannot be deployed until they get replacements of their own and can train them. Only one element of the Army, the Individual Ready Reserve, has any realistic potential for providing the solution to Gen. Rogers'—and the Army's—problem. This element is composed of trained people who have served relatively briefly and still have obligated service remaining. But the problems with the IRR are substantial: it is more than 300,000 people understrength and it has insufficient numbers of the combat people most needed. The Army has tried a number of ideas to build its strength with only marginal success. It has been mostly unable to significantly increase the numbers of combat specialists.

The availability of trained manpower for immediate use as combat replacements while the country mobilizes is every bit as vital to our defenses as adequate supplies of weapons, ammunition and fuel. This is a problem that only Congress, charged by the Constitution to “raise armies,” can solve—and a solution must be found.